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ABSTRACT

For several semesters, a professor of higher education at the University of Memphis, in Tennessee, has incorporated electronic mail and the Internet into assignments and classes, including a course on community colleges. At the beginning of courses, a list of e-mail addresses is compiled and distributed to students to enhance communication. Problems with the use of e-mail, however, include the fact that not all students have e-mail access when the course begins and not all systems are compatible for exchanging files. E-mail does provide the major advantage, though, of enabling shy students to communicate with the instructor more freely. An assignment incorporating World Wide Web pages has also been used, with students asked, for example, to find Web sites corresponding to specific types of community colleges, write descriptions of the sites, and present the sites to other students. Problems with the use of the Internet include anxiety related to new techniques and whether students or teachers receive and read e-mail messages sent. Advantages include students' receptivity to the use of the Internet and understanding of its importance, the fact that students who are already proficient in the technology assist other students and the teacher, and the professional development opportunities provided to the instructor. A 17-item list of Useful Web Sites in Teaching about the Community College is appended. (HAA)

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Using the Internet to Teach about the Community College

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Every decade brings a new set of expectations for faculty in their teaching and curriculum development. In the 1970s it was being relevant. In the 1980s it was being outcomes oriented, sometimes to the point of writing behavioral objectives for every lesson. In the 1990s it is integrating information technology into the classroom. Faculty are urged to "travel the Information Super Highway" by incorporating the Internet into their classes and assignments. Many faculty are already doing this. At the high end are faculty in computer science, where technology is integrated into the curriculum in 85% of the course sections offered in 1996. At the low end are social science faculty, with only 26% of course sections reflecting the integration of technology (Market View, 1996).

Four semesters ago I began to realize that I was sitting by the wayside of the information highway. If I didn't get on it soon, I was going to be left behind, watching others travel to new dimensions in their teaching and research. So I staggered onto the highway by plunging myself and my students into some Internet assignments, including use of e-mail. In this paper I will touch upon some of my adventures in this travel. As I describe some ways I tried to use the Internet, I will also detail some problems I encountered with each way as well as some positive outcomes. In an appendix I will provide a list of some useful web sites for teaching about the community college.

Institutional Context

I teach masters and doctoral level students in a public, Doctorate I urban university in the Midsouth. Most of the students are faculty or administrators in area schools such as a community college or a Baccalaureate II institution, but some are administrators in local community agencies. Almost none are technologically sophisticated; most use the computer regularly for word processing only (until they take my courses!).

Also, my institution is technologically impoverished. The College of Education faculty are considered more fortunate than faculty in other colleges, because we all have a computer--although some of them are Macs from the late 1980s. My department has a computer lab consisting of eight Mac computers bought in 1988. Access to the Internet is through a very early version of Netscape *Navigator* (1.2).

When I teach on campus and want to show students how to access the Internet, we go into this lab. If I have more than eight students, some have to team up and use the same computer. Actually, this works well for those students who are new to the Internet. I ask that students who know how to get online work with those who don't. In this way I usually don't have to show students what to do. Other students teach them instead.

When I want to access the Internet during a class period, I either have to take everyone to the lab (which is sometimes busy with other classes) or I can wheel in one of the 1988 Macs to my classroom. We then gather around the computer and do the best we can to see the screen.

In short, we're working under primitive conditions technologically.

Using e-mail to communicate with students

When my courses begin, I ask my students for information on how to contact them, including

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their e-mail address. Most students have an address, although they may not regularly check their mail or send messages. I then distribute the list to all the students so they can contact one another, including by e-mail. I also set up a list in my computers (one at home and one at school) so that I can send messages to the class as a whole as well as to individual students.

I hoped I could use the e-mail to build upon class discussions by asking students to comment on questions in preparation for the next class or by extending the last class's conversations through further dialogue. My hope has never materialized because not all my students have access to email and the Internet when the course begins. Usually one or two students per course will need to set up a vax account with the university in order to access the Internet and send and receive email. If they do not have a modem on their work or home computer (and not everyone has a home computer), they have to use one of the University's computers to access their e-mail and web pages. Since it takes a week or two to set up the account, I know I'm not communicating with everyone if I send an e-mail message after the first class or two. So that no one is disadvantaged, I have to print the message and send it by fax to the student(s) without e-mail. This semester I have a student who does not even have access to a fax machine, so he is out of the electronic communication loop.

Another difficulty with using e-mail is that not all systems are compatible if one wants to send files. Last semester I taught two courses off campus in a weekend format. Since there would three or weeks in between my visits, I wanted to send some information, e.g., a revised page of my syllabus, through e-mail. Some students received it in readable form and others didn't, and I didn't know if there were things I could do to ensure the files could be sent in a readable format to everyone. Eventually I had to fax the material to some of the students.

While use of e-mail has not worked out as I hoped, even my limited use of it has some positives. Invariably one or two students in a course (I usually have between six to ten students in a course) either like to use e-mail already or learn to like it and e-mail me regularly about the course or about their program of study or about conferences and Web sites they think I'd be interested in. Sometimes these are students who are rather shy in class, but through their use of e-mail, I get to know them better and they me. As Erwin and Baldwin (1997) state, "Email (sic) has changed the relationship between student and instructor, allowing for increased opportunities for individualized, prompt feedback."

Incorporating Relevant Web Sites

For several semesters I have based 5 to 10% of a student's grade upon a Web page assignment. The first semester I simply asked students to find a Web site relevant to the course. They had to write up a brief description of the contents of the Web site and show the Web site to the class.

In my community college course, I have asked students to pick a state and find a Web site for an urban, suburban, and rural community college in that state. Each student then must take the other students to these sites in her/his oral presentation of this assignment. In the written component of this assignment, students have to provide certain information about each college, information gained from the college's home page. If the information is not on the home page, students must contact the school for the information, preferably using e-mail to elicit the information. Additionally, students hand in a print copy of the relevant parts of the Web site. This assignment helps illustrate the differences among the three types of community colleges and the differences among states. When I teach the community college course this summer, I will further broaden students' understanding of the diversity among two-year schools by showing them Web sites about tribal colleges, Historically Black two-year schools, and Hispanic Serving two-year schools.

The assignment of looking at two-year colleges' Web sites also provides an opportunity to discuss the purposes of home pages and the characteristics of effective ones (Solarek, 1996) and helps

students develop a critical eye in their Web searches. To illustrate the possible purposes of institutional home pages, in another course I devised a small research project that used data already collected through an assignment to find Web sites of several related colleges. First I took all the students' copies of institutional web pages and used each home page's first page to create a list of possible topics or links on the initial home page. I then asked each student to use this list to check off which ones were on the first page of the institutions they had examined. Finally, I combined their individual tallies to determine which topics or areas were most likely to be have a link on an institution's home page. Through this collective look at home pages, students were able to see how some institutions used their home page for recruiting while others used it for providing information for current students, faculty, and staff.

I have also asked students to find Web sites that provide information for the research paper I require in each course. In one page, students must state the paper's topic, formulate the research question(s), list the sites, including their URL address, and provide a brief description of information found on the site.

Requiring students to use information gained from Web sites in their papers brings up the question of how to cite information found on the Internet. All students in the College of Education are required to use American Psychological Association (APA) style in citing information. Yet the most recent edition of the APA style manual provides little help in citing information from electronic sources. I give students an article on "cyber citations" (Arnzen 1996, p. 72) and we discuss how to cite an Internet document. We also discuss the necessity of printing any document we we might cite and the importance of recording not only when the Web page was last updated but also the date we access the page. Arnzen (1996) lists two Web sites that give information on APA style for cyber cits. Students may use the version described on either site, but they must indicate which site, and therefore, which version they use. Also I created a handout that showed the two versions for referencing the Web site.. I had a hard time figuring out how to do this and shared my frustration and tentativeness with the students, much to their delight. Discussing the problems in cyber cits, such as the lack of a page number in many documents (Gryta & Widner, 1977) also provides an opportunity to reinforce what must be included in a reference to a book or journal article.

Other Problems and Positives

Problems. Requiring use of the Internet can be very anxiety producing, for both teacher and students (Ervin & Baldwin, 1997). Crouch and Montecino (1997) have coined the phrase "asynchronous anxiety" (p. 1) to describe the anxiety people undergo in virtual courses. For example, instructors worry if all the students have received their email messages, and students worry if the instructors has received theirs. While I have not taught virtual courses, I do worry that students will not receive or will not read my e-mail messages sent between class meetings. Their not receiving or reading them is particularly problematic when I use the message to provide further information about the format or content of an assignment due at the next class meeting.

Using the Internet, for e-mail messages and for accessing the World Wide Web, can also be traumatic for instructors who are uncomfortable when they are not the classroom expert. "[C]lassroom roles can blur" (Ervan & Baldwin, 1997) when some students know more about the Internet than does their instructor.

Positives. The positives are several. First of all, students are very receptive to being required to access the Internet. Some are initially worried because they have rarely or never done it before, but they all seem to understand and accept the importance of learning how to use e-mail and "surf the net." Either intuitively or rationally, they know that "'getting online' is not only access to information and resources, it is access to learning and power" (Menchaca, 1997). One older student told me how much he enjoyed me as a teacher because I was "on the cutting edge technologically." As you can see from my descriptions of the assignments and the technology available to us at my university, that is hardly an

accurate description. But it's all relative. My assignments forced him to get an e-mail address, learn how to send and receive email (which he stills does very infrequently), and learn how to search the Web. He was delighted with his new skills. His delight is typical of the students new to the Internet.

Students who are already proficient in using e-mail and accessing the Web seem to enjoy being the class expert in these areas. Both I and other students feel free to ask them questions, and they willingly share their expertise. Integrating the Internet into course work creates opportunities for collaboration and community in the learning process as this example illustrates (Ervin & Baldwin, 1977).

Another positive is my own professional development in the use of information technology. Requiring students to locate relevant Web sites has compelled me to find some also. Charging students with using and citing Web documents in their papers has driven me to learn how to do the same. If I had not incorporated information technology into my classes, I would not now regularly use the Internet to search for information for my research projects and I would not know how to cite Internet sources in my writings.

Additionally, I think I have also developed as a teacher. I learn *with* my students the possibilities and the problems in finding and using online information. Being a fellow learner reminds me of how it feels to be a novice rather than the expert in a class. Like Kilian (1997), I believe that "if we consider ourselves continuing learners . . . , we will deal with our students more constructively: we will learn more and better, and so will they."

Conclusion

My students and I are now regular travelers on the information super highway. Hobbled by the university's insufficient technology, we limp along when we are in the classroom. At home or in our offices with our own equipment, some of us run or gallop; others have to sit out the journey until they can come to the university. In spite of these obstacles, what is most important is that we are on our way.

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Appendix

Useful Web Sites in Teaching about the Community College

April 5, 1997

Lists of two-year college links:

- Community College Web, maintained by Maricopa Community Colleges:

  <http://www.mcli.dist.maricopa.edu/cc/>

  Provides links to over 560 community colleges arranged in alphabetical order and geographical order: USA (524), Canada (32), and Europe (6)

- Web U.S. Community Colleges, maintained by University of Texas at Austin:

  <http:/utexas.edu/world/comcol.alpha/>

  Lists all two-year regionally accredited U.S. colleges alphabetically. Colleges can also be located by states.

- U.S. Two-Year Colleges, maintained by University of Toledo:

  <http://www.sp.utoledo.edu/twoyrcol.html>

  Provides access to over 830 two-year colleges by state.

- Yahoo's List of Community Colleges:

  <http://www.yahoo.com/Education/Higher_Education/Community_Colleges>

- For **tribal colleges**, go to the American Indian College Fund web page

  <http://hanksville.phast.umass.edu/defs/independent/AICF.html>

  or the American Higher Education Consortium web site

  <http://www.fdl.cc.mn.us/aihec/>

- For a list of **Historically Black Community Colleges**:

  <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/mrc/hbcus.htm>

- For **Historically Black Colleges** and **Hispanic Serving Colleges**, some of which are two-year schools:

  <http://web.fie.com/web/mol/index.htm>

Relevant Organizations:

- **Association of Community Colleges**

  <http://www.aacc.nche.edu/>

- **League for Innovation in the Community College**

  <http://www.league.org/>

- **ERIC Clearing House for Community Colleges**

  <hhtp://www.gseis.ucla.edu/ERIC/eric.html>

Community College Journals On Line (in whole or part):

- ***Community Services CATALYST***: Volume 21, No. 3, Summer 1991 through Volume 23, No. 3, Summer 1993

  <gopher://borg.lib.vt.edu:70/11/catalyst>

- ***Teaching in the Community College Journal*** (TCC-J), produced by Kapi'olani Community College

  Volume 1, No. 1 Fall 1995
  Volume 1, No. 2 Winter (January) 1996
  Volume 1, No. 3 Spring (May) 1996

  <http://leahi.kcc.hawaii.edu/pub/

- ***League of Innovation Abstracts***

  Vol 8, No. 1, January 1995 to present and some back issues for 1994

  <http://www.league.org/leadabst.html>

- ***New Directions for Community Colleges***

  <http://www.jbp.com/ndcc.html>

  Has Table of Contents of recent issues

- ***Community College Review***

  <http://www2.ncsu.edu/ncsu/cep/acce/ccreview/ccreview.html>

  Provides information about the journal but no table of contents or access to contents of journal.

Sample Web Pages of Individual Community Colleges

- **Hillsborough Community College (FL)**

  <http://www.hcc.cc.fl.us/>

  Has a four-star (highest) rating by Magellan

- **Fulton Montgomery Community College (NY)**

  <http:/www/tsei/k12.ms.us/fmcchome.htm>

  Has a one-star (lowest) rating by Magellan